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November 1, 1996

North Judson - Wayne Township

PUBLIC LIBRARY

Federal Communication Commission  
Office of the Secretary  
1919 M Street, NW Room 222  
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Docket No. 96-45

Concerning the Universal Service Proceedings (Docket No. 96-45), I would like to depict our situation to you so you can better understand why libraries and schools **need free access** to the Internet and other advanced telecommunication services.

My Library serves a population of 4,653 persons in rural northwest Indiana. Our community is essentially composed of farmers and workers employed outside the county. Economically we rank 92nd in the state. To reach facilities for further education and/or training our residents must drive approximately an hour or more in any direction. Both the school system and the library have and will continue to invest heavily in technology because technology defines everyone's future. "Access Indiana" was initiated by the Indiana legislature as a grant program to help schools and libraries wire and purchase equipment for advanced technology. Unfortunately, it is **the continuing connection costs that destroy the benefits** of this program.

Until earlier this year our county did not have fiber optic cabling (essential to access the internet and other advanced technology services using a local telephone number) nor was there any plan by the telephone company for its future installation. Local outcry and "Access Indiana" helped force United Telephone/Sprint to install fiber optic lines into what they consider a high cost/low return rural area. "Great!" we thought, until the **ONLY** provider for an internet gateway bared its service charges.

Access fees, particularly ones in areas considered high cost/low return areas by telephone companies, eliminate libraries and schools. Our county school systems must pay \$1,200 a month to connect to the internet and libraries will be charged \$225 a month for internet service which will be available only during operating hours, making research during those "free" before or after work hours impossible. On top of this fee, the telephone company charges \$37 a month per telephone line. **We are talking a monthly minimum total of \$262 to \$1237 for our libraries and schools.** Dial-up access for individuals is \$19.95 for 20 hours a month, base rate....more hours, more money. Compare this to people living in Indianapolis who can have UNLIMITED time through a local telephone number at an average of **\$20 a month**. Do we detect an injustice here?

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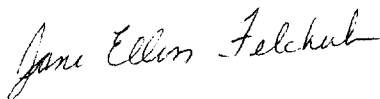
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Anyone on the Internet can tell you that if you know **exactly** where you are going, if the site still exists, and if you do not need to download, reaching your destination is relatively quick. However, if you are not sure what you are looking for, or where to find it, then the search takes a lot of time. Libraries are already trying to organize where valuable information sites reside, but the effort is time consuming and frustrating due to rapid change on the internet. Limitations imposed on the number of searches and their length of time because of economic necessity would mean that only trained staff members would/could be allowed access to the internet in order for the library to get the most information/use for the money. This concept violates the basic principles of the library

All types of literacy, a pillar of library philosophy and service, are essential for creating and maintaining productive, rewarding corporate and private lives. To help achieve this libraries **MUST** 1) remain the great equalizer between people who can afford the latest technology and those who cannot; 2) provide prompt, efficient access to information for patrons without the time or skills to find it on their own; and 3) prepare patrons to make better use of the internet and the information gleaned from it.

Without free access, or at least a limit on the amount of fees that can be charged to schools and libraries in high cost/low return rural areas, we will not be able to offer valuable and desired internet service to our patrons. It will be limited to a tool only for trained staff or to those who can afford their own computer and connection. As a library that owes its construction to the generosity of Andrew Carnegie, we continue to follow his belief that access to all, for the betterment of all, is essential.

Thank you in advance for keeping technology available to all people, regardless of their economic circumstances. Thank you, again, for making it possible for tax dollars to benefit the largest number of citizens by keeping telecommunications rates for advanced technology free (or minimal) for libraries and schools, our current and continuing education sites. Education teaches fishing, it doesn't give fish handouts.

Sincerely



Jane Ellen Felchuk  
Librarian/Director  
North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library  
on behalf of the Library Board of Trustees